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Senators hear serious infrastructure needs of schools

LANSING – School districts all around the state have serious infrastructure needs, the Senate Appropriations K-12 Subcommittee was told Monday during a day-long hearing.

Representatives from school districts, educational associations and research groups came to testify on the inadequate conditions of many school buildings and equipment and the inadequate funding many districts are receiving to fix the conditions. A wide area of schools was represented, from Detroit to River Valley to the Upper Peninsula.

“During the hearing school districts identified many issues they would like to see addressed,” said Sen. Ron Jelinek, subcommittee chairman. “While some schools have come up with solutions to their infrastructure needs, not all of them have the resources or are able to get bonds passed like their neighboring districts.”

In addition to the problems the committee heard, a few statewide solutions were presented.

“Our next step is to weigh the various options and proposals to help solve the disparity school districts are facing in funding,” Jelinek said.

Jelinek also said the committee heard how many school districts are not able to afford the maintenance of or replacement of old buildings; many schools have inadequate heating, electricity, plumbing and air ventilation; and many students go to school in classrooms that are unsafe and not conducive to learning. Testifiers emphasized these conditions are worsening everyday.

“While we realize there are needs to be addressed, we want to make it clear that we will not touch Proposal A, we will look to finish the work begun by Proposal A,” said Jelinek, R-Three Oaks. “When it was crafted, buildings and infrastructure were not included in the proposal. Hopefully we can find a way to add them to get our schools up to speed to provide our students with more friendly and safe learning environments.”

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